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To: ["R7 Senior" <Staff>](#)
CC:
Date: 5/15/2013 7:35:39 AM
Subject: KMOX Radio St. Louis - Koster: Landfill Smoldering Being Watched Closely

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KMOX Radio St. Louis - May 14, 2013 5:08 PM

<http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2013/05/14/koster-landfill-smoldering-being-watched-closely/>

LISTEN: Chris Koster stops by the studio to [talk](#)  about the Bridgeton landfill situation on “The Mark Reardon Show”

Underground smoldering at a suburban St. Louis landfill is being watched closely amid concerns about its proximity to buried nuclear waste, Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster said Tuesday.

Koster was in St. Louis to announce an agreement with Republic Services, operators of the Bridgeton Landfill.

For several months, a strong odor has been emitting from the landfill that sits on 52 acres near Lambert Airport, a noxious smell that has raised health concerns in addition to its unpleasantness.

By Labor Day, plans [call](#)  for a plastic cap over the landfill. If the work isn’t finished on time, Republic Services could face fines of up to \$10,000 per day, according to an [injunction](#) filed Monday in St. Louis County Circuit Court.

Tim Trost, area president for Republic Services, said six concrete pipes will be removed in late May and early June, pipes that are allowing the noxious smell to escape. The excavation process could temporarily make the smell worse, so the company agreed to [relocate](#) around 270 households within a mile of the landfill to hotels.

Environmentalists said the temporary move-out didn’t go far enough. The Missouri Coalition for the Environment said the smell lingers 5 miles or more, and everyone in that radius should have the option to move. Koster said his office agreed to the 1-mile radius because it wasn’t certain if the court would opt for a larger or smaller radius.

The odor is caused by underground smoldering occurring about 1,200 feet from an adjacent landfill, West Lake Landfill. Cold War-era nuclear waste is stored at West Lake.

Assistant Attorney General Joe Bindbeutel said there is [concern](#) that the area of smoldering is moving toward the nuclear waste, including the appearance of steam showing up in what he called the neck of the Bridgeton landfill, an area closer to the nuclear site.

“We are very, very carefully evaluating monitors in the neck area,” Bindbeutel said. “This is a critical area.”

Koster said two worst-case scenarios are being guarded against closely: The fire that burns underground emerging above ground; and the subsurface fire making its way to the nuclear waste, originally stored decades ago at West Lake after work performed by Mallinckrodt Chemical Co.’s uranium procession operations.

Bindbeutel said recovery wells are already in place in the neck area to pump out gas and heat. If the smoldering moves too close to nuclear site, a barrier would be installed to keep it at bay, Koster said. He declined to offer specifics about how the barrier would work.

Koster’s lawsuit against Republic Services, announced in March, continues. He said the suit seeks long-term solutions to problems at the landfill, while the agreement announced Tuesday addresses short-term concerns.

Koster said issues at the landfill are far from resolved.

“I am not pessimistic about the situation, but neither am I optimistic,” he said. “Everything I have learned over the last six weeks indicates this may occupy increasing levels of the state’s attention in the coming weeks and months.”

Trost said the company has already spent more than \$20 million to upgrade the gas collection system in an effort to get rid of the odor. He said the company takes “full responsibility” for making sure the odor is “significantly reduced.”